



DOCLANDS

EDUCATION

APRIL 28 - MAY 2



DOCUMENTARY SHORTS



CURRICULUM GUIDE
GRADES: 8-12

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Dear Educators,

Thank you for attending the 9th Annual DocLands Documentary Film Festival screening of the documentary shorts. We are excited to return in our 2025 spring season with a combination of both in-theater screenings for local schools and online screenings for those of you joining us from afar.

As media educators, we support film as the literature of the twenty-first century. This powerful medium sits in a critical part of human culture, at the intersection of art, industry, technology, and politics. It is a universal language that lets us tell stories about our collective hopes and fears and gives us the opportunity to make sense of the world around us and the people in it. This year, our film selections for school screenings continue to focus on increasingly relevant issues of global empathy and active citizenship, and we believe this film will be a powerful and engaging text to use in your classroom. These curricular materials are designed to get students to engage deeply with the film by the common-core aligned skills of developing an evidence-based interpretation of a text both orally and in writing.

The discussion prompts have been crafted to offer students the opportunity to grapple with questions of ethics and social justice through representations of culture in film. They offer a variety of options for fostering small-group or whole-class dialogue by addressing the film industry in general and this film in particular. If your students are already familiar with the process of writing evidence-based interpretive essays, consider using the suggested essay prompts for a short writing piece, or consider the film review format as an alternative. Additionally, student handouts for a variety of thinking routines are provided for before, during, and after viewing the film with a particular emphasis on social-emotional learning. Extension activities offer further creative opportunities for students to consider the cultural impact of the film as both an art form and a political platform. We have also included a handout that provides some context for the film festival experience, which may help to introduce your screening experience.

Thank you so much for your tireless work! Enjoy the Documentary Shorts Program!

Sincerely,
The CAFILM Education Team

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think filmmakers choose the documentary short format to tell certain stories? What are the strengths and limitations of this format compared to feature-length documentaries?
2. What responsibilities do documentary filmmakers have to their subjects? How should they balance truth, storytelling, and audience engagement?
3. How does a documentary filmmaker earn your trust? What techniques or choices - style, structure, sources - help create a sense of credibility?
4. Of the documentary shorts featured in this collection, which film did you find the most original, unique, or compelling? Why?
5. What role does emotion play in the effectiveness of a documentary? Did any of the films featured in this collection use emotion in a way that stood out to you?
6. Which film had the most unique or interesting visual style? What was unique about it? How did the style impact the subject and the story?
7. In what ways did the films you watched make you more aware of larger social, political, or cultural issues? How did they make those issues feel personal, relevant, and urgent?
8. Whose stories are being told in these documentaries? What did you see in these films that reminds you of stories from your own life or other stories you know?
9. Short films have a unique ability to capture the essence of a subject or a story. They can provide a glimpse into a much larger world. How do the films in this collection allow the viewers to experience a taste of something crucial for connecting with the human experience?
10. Do you believe short documentary films can create real change in society? How do you think the films featured in this collection might influence public opinion or policy? Can you think of examples from any of these films where this impact was clear or possible?



DISCUSSION NOTECATCHER

Directions:

Use this notecatcher to record what you take away from discussing the questions above.

IDEAS I HEARD DURING DISCUSSION

MIND-POP IDEAS

Ideas that came to my mind during discussion.

ONE IMPORTANT THING I LEARNED DURING DISCUSSION

INTERPRETIVE ESSAY PROMPTS

1. **Subject & Style:** Documentary filmmakers use multiple tools to engage the viewer emotionally and intellectually. Write an essay in which you explore how one of the films featured in this collection used specific techniques to create a sense of credibility in order to influence public opinion or policy. What choices of style, structure, or sources helped make this film particularly relevant, impactful, and urgent?
2. **Story & Societal Relevance:** Documentary films often reflect the voices and stories of individuals or communities that are marginalized or misunderstood. Write an essay in which you explore how one of the documentary films featured in this collection gives voice to a group or issue often left out of mainstream media. What larger cultural or political questions does this film raise, and why is it important that audiences hear this story now?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

International Documentary Association | The Liberating Limitations of Short Films

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/does-length-matter-liberating-limitations-short-films>

International Documentary Association | Long Visibility and Virality

<https://www.documentary.org/feature/short-docs-pathway-long-visibility-and-virality-slim-sustainability>

The Power of Proof: Using Short Films to Showcase Your Vision

<https://www.storysmart.net/the-power-of-proof76a3d9a8>

ABOUT CAFILM

The nonprofit California Film Institute celebrates and promotes film as art and education through year-round programming at the independent Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, presentation of the acclaimed Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival, as well as cultivation of the next generation of filmmakers and audiences through CAFILM Education programs.

Follow the California Film Institute on social media



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STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7

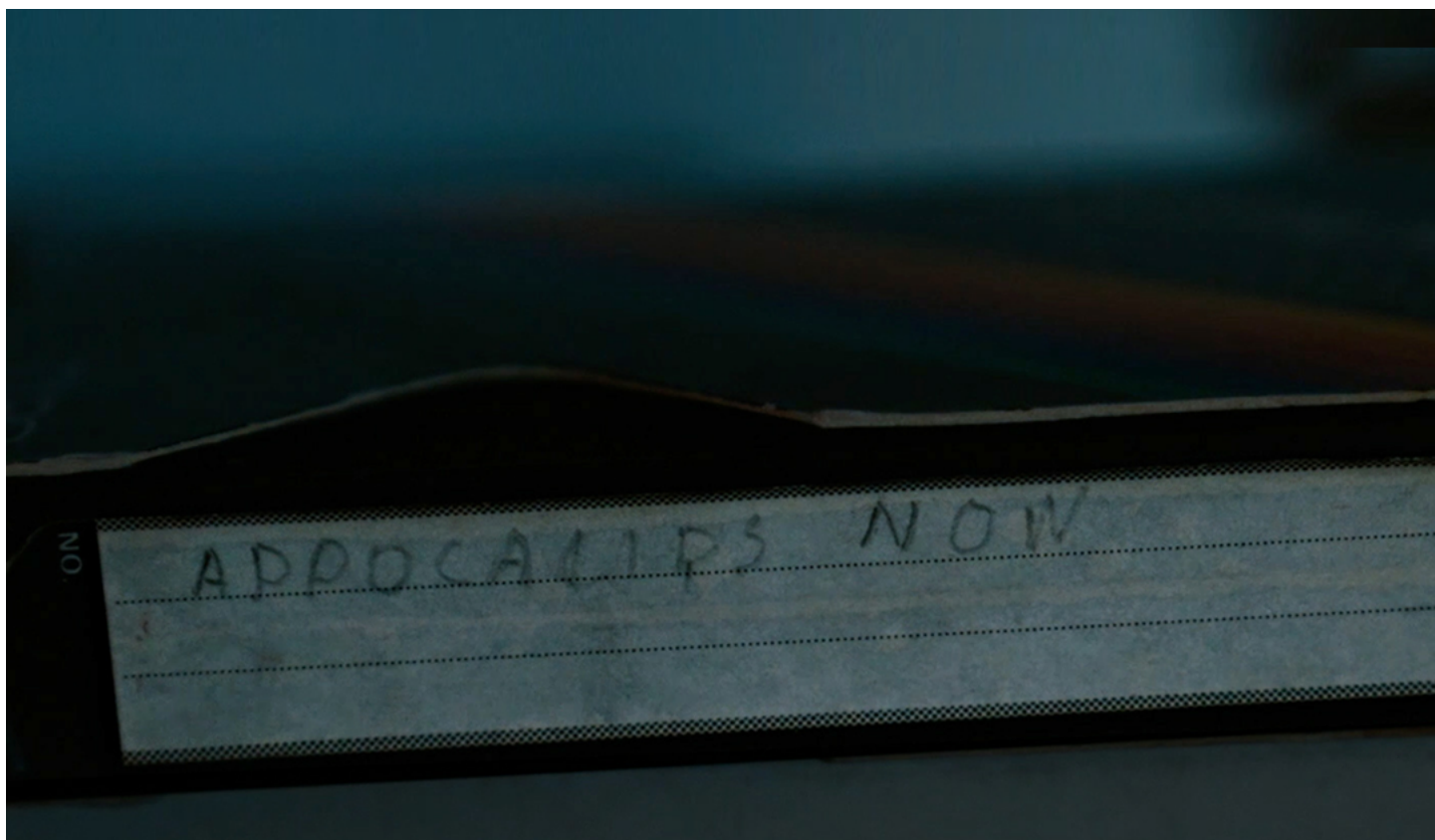
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.



Name: _____



DOCUMENTARY SHORTS



ABOUT THE FILMS

At the heart of every impactful documentary lies a carefully chosen topic that resonates with both the filmmaker and the audience. This year's collection of documentary shorts showcases a cohort of storytellers whose passion and creativity compelled them to explore unique topics and share them with the world. Each film has broader societal relevance that demands attention and will spark meaningful conversations and resonate deeply with the viewer.

Featuring filmmakers offering distinct styles with unflinching directorial voices, these short films allow us to step into other realities and appreciate the power of documentary filmmaking.

ABOUT THE FILMS



Borrowed Time

Filmmakers: Palmer Morse & Derek Knowles

About the Film: A woman finds peace during the pandemic in her solitary routine as the innkeeper of an historic Bay Area lighthouse. As her time on the island draws to an end and a return to the world she left behind beckins, life on the island raises larger questions about her relationship to the natural world, time, work, and home.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS Palmer Morse & Derek Knowles

Palmer Morse is a multi-disciplinary award-winning filmmaker who focuses on using the devices at hand in our visual and media culture that can drive our society to make change. Interested in stories of humans, our planet, and the interactions of the two, Morse often works with organizations, nonprofits, and brands in honing in on their mission in a visual format. His work has been shown in National Geographic, PBS, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Outside Magazine and in festivals such as DOC NYC, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, Indy Shorts Fest, Banff Mountain Film Festival, and Mountain film. His films have picked up a nomination for Vimeo's "Best of the Year," a Webby Award, and several Telly and festival awards. He currently lives in Oakland, California and is the Co-Founder of Spruce Tone.

Derek Knowles is a filmmaker and cinematographer working in creative nonfiction. His work has been published on The New Yorker, PBS, and The Atlantic, as well as being featured as multiple Vimeo Staff picks and on Short of the Week. His latest films have explored the relationships between humans and the natural world, most recently with Sentinels, an immersion into the world of tree-sitting which is featured as part of The Los Angeles Times Short Documentary. He was also the Director of Photography on Between Earth and Sky, which was shortlisted for the Academy Awards in 2024.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Some may view the decision to move onto an island alone in the middle of a global pandemic as a radical idea. Yet, the experience and connection to nature and place Desiree had during her time there was transformative. Ultimately we hope this film will serve as an example to encourage audiences to carve a path that brings them closer to the natural world. While Desiree's journey on that path may be a bit drastic for some, we hope this story will encourage others to take a step in that direction, no matter how small. Now nearly four years removed from the pandemic, and with it, the clamoring of a "return to normal," *Borrowed Time* is an invitation to re-evaluate our values and conventionalisms.

While our film contains deeply-rooted political, social, and philosophical aspirations in its portrayal of an alternative way of living, we believe that these have the chance to be more readily received by audiences because these aspirations are not the film's focal point, nor are these themes communicated overtly. Instead, by centering Desiree's story and assuming a show-don't-tell sensibility that resists proselytizing or didactics, our hope is that *Borrowed Time* holds up an example of how radically more liberated, vibrant, and kind life can be under a different set of circumstances that we have the power to alter. *Borrowed Time* might then be best understood as a jumping off point for a litany of bigger-issue conversations beyond one woman's story, though it is the simplicity of that story that we believe offers a wide array of entry points with which diverse audiences can engage.



Death Education

Filmmaker: Yuxuan Ethan Wu

About the Film: In China, a high school teacher has introduced a death education class for young students. On the traditional Tomb-Sweeping day, they bury unnamed ashes at a public cemetery to help students understand and contextualize the meaning of death.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER Yuxuan Ethan Wu

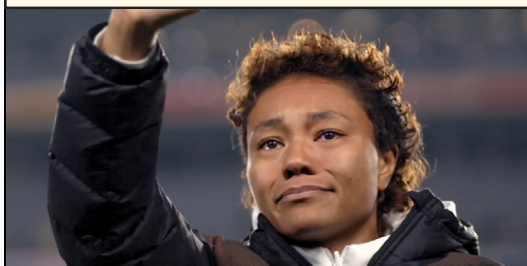
Yuxuan Ethan Wu is an emerging filmmaker and photographer based in the Bay Area. He graduated from Emerson College with a Bachelor's degree in Media Arts Production and a minor in Photography. Born and raised in Changsha, China, Wu has lived in various cities, including Beijing, Boston, and New York City. He frequently travels between the U.S. and China and is currently residing in Palo Alto, where he is pursuing an MFA at Stanford University in the Documentary Film Program, specializing in directing character-driven documentary shorts and series. His work has been featured by major news outlets, such as Phoenix New Media, Tencent, NetEase, and TJ Sports. His documentary films have been showcased at renowned international festivals, including Sundance Film Festival.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Over the past three years, I have watched friends around me face the loss of close family members for the first time, exposing an uncomfortable truth - we are unprepared to confront death. We are not taught how to process the inevitable, especially in cultures like mine, where death remains a taboo subject. In Chinese culture, death is rarely discussed, particularly in the context of parenting, leaving young people without guidance on how to navigate grief and loss.

I want to talk about death, through the eyes of teenagers, capturing their unique perspectives as they confront something that adults often avoid. I want to explore how young people make sense of death, grief, and the emotional truths that emerge when we finally face what we are rarely prepared for, for the first time - how we remember those we've lost, and how we carry forward in the face of grief.

ABOUT THE FILMS



Maybe It's Just the Rain Filmmaker: Reina Bonta

About the Film: In their debut at the FIFA World Cup, a diasporic, underdog group of young women became the first Filipino soccer team in history to win a match at the tournament. Combining home video footage and voice mail recordings, Reina, Filipino-American center back, brings us along on this turbulent journey, which culminates in an intimate, transformative trip to her grandmother's hometown in the Philippines.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER Reina Bonta

Reina Bonta is a professional football player and award-winning filmmaker who graduated from Yale in 2022. She represented the Philippines Women's National Team at the 2023 World Cup and currently competes professionally in Brazil's top division at Santos FC, birthplace of Pele, Neymar, and Marta. As a film writer/director with experiences ranging from dramatic series production at HBO to run-and-gun documentary camera work in Kenya, she is a passionate creator. Her work as an archival producer on the Amazon prime video documentary *Judy Blume Forever* helped secure a global premiere at Sundance Film Festival 2023. Her debut narrative short film *LAHI*, an award-winning story about Filipino-American identity and reconnection, was accepted to 10 nation-wide film festivals including CAAMFest and Asian World Film Festival, and was acquired for distribution. Bonta is interested in stories that humanize athletes, center family and cultural narratives, and engage the power of storytelling.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

At the FIFA Women's World Cup this past summer, under blinding stadium lights, I watched a beautiful, lofted cross find the forehead of my teammate. As she leapt up, nearly 33,000 roaring home fans went silent. She made contact, and the ball cracked against the back of the net. As I was living that moment, I realized two quintessential truths: one, we had just made history, and two, this moment and our journey deserved to be told in an authentic way. I dedicated myself, as a player with a first-hand lived perspective, to tell a highly personal and universally meaningful story that would humanize and bring color to the image of our athletes. Primarily, I sought to underscore the deep cultural significance of a diasporic team representing the Philippines at our maiden appearance on the global stage, using my own tender relationship with my lola "grandmother" in Tagalog, to do so. It is my hope that this short, mighty film strikes a chord with many.



We Were the Scenery Filmmaker: Christopher Robert Radcliff

About the Film: In 1975, soon after the end of the Vietnam War, Hoa Thi Le and Hue Nguyen Che fled the country on a small boat. After nine days at sea, they docked in the Philippines, where they were held in a refugee camp. During this time, along with nearly 100 other refugees, they were utilized as background extras in the filming of *Apocalypse Now*. Guided by their experiences, *We Were the Scenery* is a perspective and memories of their lived short documentary that traces Vietnam, The Philippines, and the USA within past and present, truth and fiction, life and cinema.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER Christopher Robert Radcliff

Christopher Radcliff is an award-winning mixed Chinese American filmmaker based in New York City. His work has screened worldwide including at Sundance, SXSW, Clermont-Ferrand, and Rotterdam film festivals, at The Shed in New York City and The Swatch Art Peace Hotel in Shanghai, and online via Criterion, Short of the Week, Vimeo Staff Picks, and Le Cinema Club. His first feature film *THE STRANGE ONES* (co-created with Lauren Wolkstein) was released theatrically in 2018, and was named by John Waters as one of the top ten films of the year. He is a member of the WGAE and the Motion Picture Editors Guild, and a recipient of fellowships from Oxbelly and Almanack Screenwriters. He received his MFA from Columbia University, and currently teaches in the Film/Video Department at Pratt Institute.

BEFORE VIEWING

SUBJECT, STORY, & STYLE JOURNAL RESPONSE

Directions:

At the heart of every impactful documentary lies a carefully chosen topic that resonates with both the filmmaker and the audience. This year's collection of documentary shorts showcases a cohort of storytellers whose passion and creativity compelled them to explore unique topics and share them with the world. Each film has broader societal relevance that demands attention and will spark meaningful conversations and resonate deeply with the viewer.

1. If you were going to make a documentary short film, what would be the subject of that film? What story are you compelled to tell and why?

2. What creative filmmaking ideas do you envision for telling this story? What choices in style, structure, or sources, would you employ in order to make this story both credible and impactful?

3. Why would this film have broader societal relevance that demands attention?

WHILE VIEWING

SUBJECT, STORY & STYLE

Directions:

Documentaries use facts, evidence, and firsthand accounts to tell compelling stories. The style of the documentary, whether observational or participatory, affects how the story is presented. Objectivity and credibility are crucial, as are accuracy and transparency. Visuals, audio, and storytelling techniques create a personal and emotional connection with the audience, allowing viewers to empathize with the subject or issue presented.

While viewing each of the films in this collection of documentary shorts, use the notecatcher to record details about the subject, the story, and the style in order to dig a little deeper after viewing with interpretive analysis work.

SUBJECT

What is the subject of the film? This is the person or event the film discusses, describes, or deals with. What do you learn about the subject of the film? Record specific details as they are covered or revealed in the film.

STORY

At its simplest level, a plot is the sequence of events that make up a story. It's the structure that holds the documentary together and guides the audience through the journey of the people involved. In contrast, a story is the overarching narrative that encompasses the themes and emotions of the film. What story does the film tell?

STYLE

The documentary short is a genuine, dynamic genre that narrates, exhibits, and probes a subject and demonstrates, investigates, questions, or challenges an important social, political, or cultural issue. What style does the filmmaker use to treat the subject and tell the story? How does the filmmaker uniquely or creatively provide a medium for the viewer to discover and understand the subject?



Borrowed Time
Filmmaker: Palmer Morse & Derek Knowles

SUBJECT	
STORY	
STYLE	

WHILE VIEWING

SUBJECT, STORY & STYLE



Death Education
Filmmaker: Yuxuan Ethan Wu

SUBJECT

STORY

STYLE



Maybe it's Just the Rain
Filmmaker: Reina Bonta

SUBJECT

STORY

STYLE



We Were the Scenery
Filmmaker: Christopher Robert Radcliff

SUBJECT

STORY

STYLE

AFTER VIEWING

ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY & SIX-WORD REVIEW

Directions:

The documentary short takes its lineage and influences from some of the most acclaimed films of all time. The genre needs to continuously grow and evolve in order to stay interesting. Films that showcase real people, real events, and real issues need a real creative vision behind them in order to be compelling for a wider audience. Share your critical response to each of the films with your overall thoughts on the subject, story, and filmmaker's vision by writing a one-sentence summary and a six-word review of each film.

Borrowed Time

Filmmakers: Palmer Morse & Derek Knowles

One-Sentence Summary

My Six-Word Review

Death Education

Filmmaker: Yuxuan Ethan Wu

One-Sentence Summary

My Six-Word Review

Maybe it's Just the Rain

Filmmaker: Reina Bonta

One-Sentence Summary

My Six-Word Review

We Were the Scenery

Filmmaker: Christopher Robert Radcliff

One-Sentence Summary

My Six-Word Review

AFTER VIEWING WINDOW OR MIRROR?

Directions:

The world looks different depending on who and where you are. Film has the power to transform human experience and reflect it back to us. In that reflection we can sometimes see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Think of those stories as mirrors. Film also offers views of worlds that are unfamiliar to us and has the power to provide us with insight into perspectives different from our own. Think of those stories as windows. Think about these terms in relation to the films you've just watched and respond to the following prompts, using evidence from the films to support your writing.

1. Of these films, which one was the best mirror: a story that reflected something you see or have experienced in your own life, and gave you a way to see your own experience from a new perspective? What was relatable about this story and what was unique about the way the filmmaker chose to tell the story?

2. Of these films, which one was the best window: a story with insight into a world, identity or experience you were unfamiliar with? What was unique about this story, and what was unique about the way the filmmaker chose to tell the story?

3. Of these films, which film had the most compelling topic with the most broader societal relevance? How or why?

AFTER VIEWING

LENSES FOR DIALOGUE

How to use this thinking routine:

This thinking routine is for looking through lenses and exchanging perspectives. Respond to each of the prompts by recording your thoughts in the respective boxes. Then, share your ideas with a table partner or in small groups.

<p style="text-align: center;">SEE</p> <p>Reflect more deeply on each of the films in the collection of documentary shorts. What did you notice? Make a list of observations that set the films apart or connected them on some level.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">CHOOSE A LENS</p> <p>Think about how you see the world: your lenses. These could be related to your role in your family, your race, your ethnicity, your gender, your sexuality, or anything else about you. Choose one lens and write about how you might see or think about the world through that lens.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">PROBE</p> <p>After watching the films in this collection of documentary shorts, ask some questions to understand more about another person's lens and perspectives. This could be the lens of one of the filmmakers or any one of the people involved in the stories.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">REFLECT</p> <p>Think again about the subjects and stories of each of the films in the collection. Do you have any new observations, ideas, or questions? What issues or themes did your lenses invite you to think more deeply about?</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">SHARE</p> <p>With a table partner or small group, exchange perspectives and look through other lenses. Record highlights of your conversation here.</p>	

A Thinking Routine Adapted from Harvard Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education:
<https://pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

THE PERSONAL ESSAY FILM

Directions:

At the heart of every impactful documentary lies a carefully chosen documentary topic that resonates with both the filmmaker and the audience. The process of selecting a topic for your own documentary can be challenging. The same is true for the personal essay film.

Personal essay films are a great entry point to filmmaking because of the low barriers. You don't need a big crew. You don't need sets, props, or actors. All you need is a basic camera, simple editing software, and the courage to share your own story. And even the camera isn't necessary if opting for a found-footage approach. With these few ingredients, the personal essay film becomes a powerful tool for communicating your unique perspective to the world in short documentary-like form.

In this extension activity you will learn a basic production approach for creating a 3-minute personal essay film, combining scripted narration with symbolic video imagery to tell a story from your own life.

Consider the following ideas before choosing a topic for your personal essay film:

- Passion fuels creativity and it should be the starting point for this project.
- Reflect on your interests, experiences, and beliefs. This will help lead you toward a compelling topic that will resonate deeply with you and a wider audience.
- What are the issues that ignite your curiosity or stir your emotions?
- What stories do you feel compelled to share with the world?
- By tapping into your passion, you'll not only find inspiration, but also authenticity in your personal essay filmmaking journey.
- Remember that passion alone is not necessarily enough. It's important to think about your chosen topic as having some broader significance or appeal beyond your own personal interests.
- What is the societal relevance of your story and the impact the subject matter might have on a wider audience?
- Does your story have the potential to spark meaningful conversations or affect change?
- Balancing personal passion and creative inspiration is the key to making a compelling personal essay film.

MY PLACE | MY STORY

Foundations of Filmmaking and The Personal Essay Film online course

Enroll for Free:

<https://www.cafilmeducationonline.org/courses/foundations-personal-essay>

CAFILM Education's virtual course curriculum for making a personal essay film



ABOUT FILM FESTIVALS



An opening night screening at the Mill Valley Film Festival.

What is a film festival?

A film festival is an event in which multiple movies are presented over the course of one or several days. Depending on the size of the festival, all of the screenings may take place in a single theater or may involve multiple venues throughout a city. Festivals also include special events like panel discussions with filmmakers and actors. Typically, filmmakers submit their works to a festival, where a team of curators selects the best entries for inclusion in the festival. For independent and international filmmakers, festivals are often an important way to raise awareness of a film, generate an audience, and/or attract a studio to purchase the rights to distribute a film in a wider release. Acceptance into a major festival can add significant prestige to a film, with some festival awards (such as the Cannes Film Festival's Palme d'Or) considered among the highest honors a film can receive.

There are many film festivals throughout the world, with some focusing on particular themes, such as highlighting LGBTQ films/filmmakers, specific cultural groups, or particular genres. While some of the more famous festivals may be in distant locations, there are hundreds of small festivals spread through every corner of the world and, increasingly, festivals are using streaming access to make it easier for the public to view their curated programs.

History of DocLands Documentary Film Festival

Presented by the California Film Institute, DocLands is a vibrant celebration of nonfiction storytelling held annually in Marin County, California. Expanding upon the exchange of ideas and inspiration through captivating screenings, networking, and engaging conversations, DocLands strives to foster dialogue, inspire connections, and

build an inclusive community around the art of documentary filmmaking. DocLands aims to illuminate filmmakers' diverse perspectives and ignite a passion for exploring real-world issues by showcasing compelling stories and the thought-provoking insights behind them. Join us as we embark on a journey to discover, connect, and celebrate the power of documentary cinema.



The Smith Rafael Film Center, home of the Mill Valley Film Festival

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the purpose of a film festival? What are the benefits for filmmakers? For the audience? For the community?
2. How might the films at a festival differ from the films available to watch at your local movie theater?
3. What qualities do you think festival curators might look for in a film? If you are watching a festival film with a class/school group, what aspects of the film do you think made it appealing to the curators?

Get Involved!

Many film festivals, including the Mill Valley Film Festival, have student film categories. If you are a filmmaker, explore FilmFreeway (www.filmfreeway.com) for a database of worldwide film festivals where you can submit your film. The call for entries for MVFF opens in late February and closes in June. Youth filmmakers do not have to pay an entry fee. MVFF also offers many opportunities for volunteering. Find out more at <https://www.cafilm.org/volunteer/>.